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ABSTRACT

Despite increased immigration and families living in poverty, as well as relatively low teacher salaries, New Zealand has produced some of the highest literacy rates in the industrialized world. Its reputation as a nation of readers has intrigued North American theorists and educators alike. This led a group of 50 U.S. educators to visit New Zealand during the summer of 2000 to observe firsthand the literacy practices used in its primary classrooms. This paper offers some observations of literacy education in New Zealand. The paper describes the "literacy block," a mandated uninterrupted period of time in which students are focused on literacy development. It discusses the larger context of the primary classroom and notes that for those children who do not start out as successful readers, Reading Recovery is available. The paper proceeds through a Reading Recovery lesson and provides the history of the Reading Recovery Program, developed in the 1970s in New Zealand by Marie Clay. It points out that there are a number of other programs currently being implemented, including: the New Zealand Literacy (and Numeracy) Strategy which was established with the aim of improving literacy; programs funded through the reading, writing, and mathematics proposals pool (RWMP); and the Literacy Leadership Program for Primary Schools, developed by Learning Media along with a team of recognized literacy experts and practitioners. The paper also cites "Feed the Mind," a multi-media public campaign offering ideas on how to help young children learn. It discusses assessment and future challenges in New Zealand literacy education. Includes 6 notes. (NKA)

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Glimpses of Literacy Education in New Zealand.

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Glimpses of Literacy Education in New Zealand

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In the last two decades, New Zealand has achieved international renown for its literacy education. Despite increased immigration and families living in poverty, as well as relatively low teacher salaries, New Zealand has produced some of the highest literacy rates in the industrialized world. Its reputation as a nation of readers has intrigued North American theorists and educators alike. It is exactly this curiosity that led a group of 50 U.S. educators to visit New Zealand during the summer of 2000 to observe firsthand the literacy practices used in primary classrooms.

The Literacy Framework

The most powerful component of literacy education in New Zealand appears to be the daily literacy block of two hours each morning. The literacy block is a mandated uninterrupted period of time in which students are focused on literacy development. Pullouts of any kind are not allowed. During the literacy block students engage in guided reading, shared reading, independent silent reading, reading aloud and writing. These practices are described below.

Guided reading is designed to help children develop positive attitudes toward reading by helping them become successful readers. One of its goals is to teach word

identification as well as comprehension strategies, but to do so in a way that is brief and does not distract from the enjoyment of reading. In most instances, teachers and students read an entire book in one sitting, keeping the instructional focus on making meaning.

The teacher plays a central role in guided reading and works with a small group of children. First, the teacher introduces the text to be read and sets a purpose for reading. Then children read a section of the text and discuss it with the teacher. This process is repeated until the entire text is read. By using this process, the teacher and the children "think" their way through the text. Thus, enhancing both comprehension and enjoyment.

Shared reading, a technique developed by Don Holdaway, is designed to extend exposure to print in a non-threatening way so the reader enjoys the text. Shared reading experiences extend throughout the week. For instance, on Day 1, the teacher works with a small group of children and introduces a new book. The book is read using the guided reading procedure mentioned previously. On subsequent days, the children return to the book by re-reading it in small groups, alone, or in pairs.

During independent reading time, children read on their own or with a partner. This quiet, sustained reading gives children the chance to read from a wide variety of materials, applying reading strategies learned previously. It promotes fluency and builds confidence and enjoyment of reading.

Reading aloud is a daily practice in New Zealand classrooms. In this activity the teacher reads aloud to the whole class or small groups. The purpose is to model phrased

fluent reading, develop knowledge of text structures and vocabulary, expose children to a variety of genre and involve children in reading for enjoyment. Favorite texts are often reread many times in primary school. Books that are read aloud are used as a springboard for writing and other activities.

Writing is a natural outgrowth of reading. Children engage in writing because it is a way to respond to reading. They use a variety of written texts to express their views, ideas, and knowledge. Some of the forms include: language experience stories, writing responses to what was read, story writing, journal writing and report writing. It is not uncommon to see student writing displayed in the classroom and in the school hallways. The writing process is used so that students can experience being an author. Writing is always shared with the class, with others in the school, and with those beyond the school.

The Larger Context of the Classroom

The success of these components in practice is determined by a number of factors in New Zealand classrooms. First, children enter school on their fifth birthday, regardless of the month in which the birthday occurs, and become year 1 students. In most cases, the children stay with the same teacher for an extended period of time, often for several years. This grouping is family-like and helps provide a support system as the children develop naturally. In addition, teachers get to know their students' abilities very well so that when the teacher and test results indicate it is time for promotion, students begin working on the next year's curriculum. Thus, promotion to the next grade level is done

throughout the school year. A great deal of flexibility exists within a system such as this, which is important since typical class size is 30 children.

Second, there are no textbooks used in New Zealand classrooms. Children read a variety of books that are written at their instructional level. Teachers, who are required to do a monthly running record on each student, determine instructional levels. This information, coupled with teacher observation, helps to determine the reading level of the child, which changes frequently. Most books are color coded according to stage of reading development (i.e., emergent, early reader, fluent reader). The New Zealand Ministry of Education advocates this practice of book leveling.

A striking feature of literacy instruction in New Zealand is the close fit between the text and the reader in terms of the text's level of difficulty, the child's interest, and the child's prior knowledge. Classrooms are truly print-rich, inviting places. The attitude of New Zealand teachers is that all children can learn to read, and they expect this to happen. The typical classroom culture stresses continual development of a child's abilities, rather than accommodating fixed abilities. Since all children are mainstreamed in New Zealand, this attitude is paramount.

Despite the positive attitudes of teachers and high expectations placed on the children of New Zealand, not all children start out as successful readers. For these children, Reading Recovery is available.

Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery is an early intervention program developed to assist children in first grade who are having difficulty learning to read and write. Children eligible for this program are identified by their classroom teachers as the lowest in their class in reading acquisition and who are not acquiring reading and writing proficiency through regular classroom instruction. Reading Recovery is designed to move children in a short time from the bottom of their class to average, where they can profit from regular classroom instruction. The goal of Reading Recovery is accelerated learning so that students succeed before they enter a cycle of failure.

Reading Recovery provides one-to-one tutoring, five days per week, 30 minutes a day, by a specially trained teacher. The daily lessons during these 30-minute sessions consist of a variety of reading and writing experiences that are designed to help children develop their own effective strategies for literacy acquisition. Instruction continues until children can read at or above the class average and can continue to learn without later remedial help. Reading Recovery is supplemental to classroom instruction and lasts an average of 12-20 weeks, at the end of which children have developed a self-extending system that uses a variety of strategies to read increasingly difficult text and to independently write their own messages.

The Reading Recovery Lesson

Reading Recovery uses supportive conversations between teacher and child as the primary basis of instruction. This teacher-child talk has been found to be an effective method for experts (teachers) to help beginners (students) take on complex tasks such as reading, and is a particular need of children having difficulty in school. The Reading

Recovery lesson follows a routine framework of activities that are individually designed based on a daily analysis of student progress by the teacher. Each lesson has seven distinct parts:

1. Child rereads several familiar books. These stories come from a variety of publishers and represent a wide range of narrative and expository texts of varying difficulty levels.
2. Child rereads a book introduced in the lesson prior while teacher observes and records the child's reading behavior.
3. Child does some letter identification and learning how words work.
4. Child writes a story with teacher providing opportunities for the child to hear and record sounds in words.
5. Child rearranges his or her story form a cut-up sentence strip provided by the teacher.
6. Teacher introduces a new book carefully selected for its learning opportunities.
7. Child reads the new book orchestrating his or her current problem-solving strategies.

The professional development of teachers is an integral part of Reading Recovery. The training is an intense, yearlong course for teachers consisting of weekly classes affiliated with a regional training center. Reading Recovery uses a trainer of trainers model. University professors prepare local teacher leaders who in turn train other teachers in Reading Recovery teaching techniques. As the teachers learn how to implement the program, they work simultaneously with children in their home schools.

This model ensures that Reading recovery will have the support at the site level necessary for successful program implementation. It also sets the stage for systematic reform of how reading and writing are taught and how access is provided to good first teaching for all children.

The yearlong professional development curriculum integrates theory and practice and is characterized by intensive interaction with colleagues. Teachers-in-training conduct lessons behind a one-way glass and are observed and given feedback by their colleagues. In addition, Reading Recovery teacher leaders visit teachers at their schools and help them reflect on and improve their teaching and observing of children. The professional level of this Reading Recovery preparation has empowered teachers to make changes in their own teaching and to systematically impact the teaching in their schools.

Reading Recovery Program History

Reading Recovery was developed in New Zealand by Marie M. Clay who conducted observational research in the mid 1960s that enabled her to design techniques for detecting early reading and writing difficulties of children. In the mid 1970s, she developed Reading Recovery procedures with teachers and tested the program in the Auckland area. The success of this pilot program led to the nationwide adoption of Reading Recovery in New Zealand in the early 1980s.

The success of the program resulted in program initiatives over the next decade in Australia and Ohio (1984), Canada (1988), California and Great Britain (1991). In the United States, Reading Recovery is approved by the National Diffusion Network (NDN)

of the U.S. Department of Education. This NDN designation is a recognition of proven program effectiveness.

Although Reading Recovery is the largest and most renowned of New Zealand's literacy initiatives, it is not the only one. We learned of a number of other programs currently being implemented throughout the country.

The New Zealand Literacy Strategy

Because the population of New Zealand is multicultural and multilingual, the country continues to make literacy a priority. In 1998, the New Zealand Government announced the goal that "By 2005, every child turning nine will be able to read, write, and do maths for success". Soon after that, a 20 person Literacy Taskforce (1999) was set up and wrote a report that identified how this goal should be defined, how progress towards it could be measured, and the ways in which literacy learning could best be supported. 1

As a direct result of that report, the New Zealand Literacy (and Numeracy) Strategy was established with the aim of improving literacy. 2 Three themes form an organizing framework for the Literacy Strategy. These themes include raising expectations for student progress and achievement, lifting professional capability throughout the system, and developing community capability. The Literacy Strategy recognizes that the most important factor in a student's learning is the quality of the interaction between the student and the teacher. Thus, the dimensions of effective practice that underpin the Literacy Strategy are the teacher's knowledge of literacy

learning, high expectations for students, sound instructional strategies, engaging learners with texts, and home-school partnerships.

The initial emphasis of the Literacy Strategy has been on improving first practice in classrooms that purposefully integrates all aspects of literacy learning. The emphasis is now gradually extending to years 7 and 8 and into secondary schools. Within the context of the Literacy Strategy, language and literacy programs for non-English speaking students are also being reviewed, refined and expanded in order to meet student needs.

The New Zealand Literacy Strategy is further enhanced by involving established agencies within the school system. These constituents include: Literacy Resource Teachers who work in school clusters and provide advice on interventions to meet student needs; the literacy advisors based with School Support Services and run workshops on best practice; the Literacy Leadership facilitators who are engaged to implement a national professional development program to help principals and literacy leaders; Reading Recovery tutors; Learning and Behavior Resource Teachers, and speech language therapists. By involving as many professionals as possible in the Literacy Strategy, the themes of raising student achievement and lifting professional capability throughout the system can be realized.

Other Specific Initiatives

In addition to the New Zealand Literacy Strategy, other programs funded through the reading, writing, and mathematics proposals pool (RWMP) have also been established to assist schools. The RWMP is a contestable fund to help schools with the set-up costs of

programs for students in years 1 to 8 who are making slow progress in reading, writing and/or mathematics. This fund gives schools an additional opportunity to target specific needs. Some of the diverse programs funded from this pool include:

- the training of home-school liaison workers in the Pause-Prompt-Praise (PPP) procedure, and in previewing and reviewing texts with children.
- establishing benchmarks, developing better assessment practices, and improving reporting systems for literacy in school.
- "Headstart" programs for parents whose children are due to start school.
- mentoring programs in best literacy practice.
- recording texts for Tape-Assisted Reading Programs.
- Responsive Writing programs, including the development of quality indicators, training volunteer parents as respondents and the design of monitoring systems and record sheets for tracking literacy progress.

Finally, this list also includes HPP programs. In these programs students hear a wide variety of storybooks selected to provide the context of connected, interesting narrative for promoting oral language development and phonological awareness. Parent reading tutors help students probe the text and expand their ideas through oral responses. Oral language is integral to the reading, with lots of talking, exploration of sounds and word structures, and fun with rhyming and other activities.

Another program known as the Literacy Leadership Program for Primary Schools has been developed by Learning Media along with a team of recognized literacy experts and practitioners (including principals). It aims to raise literacy achievement, especially

among students who are not performing to their potential in years 1 to 6. The program has four intended outcomes. First, develop the knowledge and skills of principals and literacy leaders to help them enhance their literacy programs in years 1 to 6. Second, foster good-quality teaching practice. Third, reinforce high-quality, school-wide policies and practices, and finally, support effective communities of professionals.

The Literacy Leadership program supports teachers through goal-related classroom-based initiatives. Teachers first identify a target group of students and gather baseline data on literacy performance, before focusing on improving aspects of their teaching practice. They then collect comparative data to see whether they have met their goals. The program is delivered by 22 national facilitators and literacy leaders in schools who mentor principals. Together, they develop shared understandings of effective literacy instruction with their teachers.

Feed the Mind is a multi-media public campaign offering ideas on how to help young children learn. The campaign has been running since May 1999, and consists of TV advertisements, radio ads, billboards and bus shelter posters, household deliveries of tips on how to help children learn, and pamphlets for parents. The simple message of the campaign has been that there are lots of everyday things that parents/care-givers can do with children (at home, at the shops, in the car, at the beach) that can make a very real difference to their learning.

Finally, to assist those for whom English is not their first language, the Pasifika Literacy Initiative was established. This literacy initiative has a strong focus on improving the achievement of Pasifika (Pacific Island) students. This initiative is aimed

at improving ESOL teachers' qualifications, and strengthening home-school partnerships through professional development programs.

Assessment of Literacy

One purpose of assessment in New Zealand is to monitor the successes and challenges of its national curriculum. Therefore, there are strong links between the New Zealand Literacy Strategy and the National Educational Monitoring Project (NEMP), funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Education 3. The focus of NEMP is on the educational achievements and attitudes of New Zealand primary and intermediate school children. NEMP provides a national snapshot of children's knowledge, skills and motivation, and a way to identify which aspects are improving, staying constant, or declining. The School Entry Assessment tool, which is a part of NEMP, is designed to provide teachers with reliable diagnostic information about each new entrant's understanding of numeracy, oral language and emergent literacy. This information is invaluable in helping teachers determine which types of instruction are best for individual students.

Evaluation occurs yearly, and the curriculum areas assessed in NEMP are distributed across a four-year assessment cycle, with about 25% of the curriculum being assessed each year. Year 2 students take the reading and speaking assessment while year 4 students take those evaluating writing, listening and viewing. In addition, national exemplars, which are authentic examples of student work annotated to illustrate learning achievement, and quality in relation to the levels described in the national curriculum, are currently being developed.4

NEMP produces three substantial reports each year, and there is evidence that levels of literacy achievement are rising, particularly among slow progress readers and writers. For instance, there were substantial gains from 1996 to 2000 in the ability of eight-year-olds (year 4 students) in oral reading. The percentage of students performing well above the expected level as determined by the NEMP assessors increased from 32 to 48%, and the percentage performing well below the expected level dropped from 11 to 6%. At year 8, the students reading well above the expected level increased from 51% to 56%, while those reading well below the expected level were reduced from 8% to 5%. Similar results occurred in reading comprehension. Averaged across 34 task components, 11% more of the year 4 students succeeded in 2000 than in 1996. By comparison the corresponding gain for year 8 students was 3%.

Future Challenges in New Zealand Literacy Education

The Report of the Education and Science Select Committee on the Teaching of Reading in New Zealand (2001) represented a major affirmation of the implementation of current policy through the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. However, New Zealand shares challenges in literacy education common to most western countries. For instance, the gap between non-Māori and Māori reading ability is a current issue and a future challenge. The NEMP project report for the year 2000 indicates that, at year 4, non-Māori performed better than Māori on 94% of the English language reading tasks. The corresponding figures for year 8 students were 53% of reading tasks. The issue was not so much oral reading, as comprehension. The Literacy Strategy appears to be addressing this discrepancy. For example, an analysis of the data for oral reading showed that there

have been considerable gains at year 4, with an increase from 18% to 31% of Māori students performing well above the expected level, and a decline in the percentage performing well below the expected level from 19% to 12%.

A second challenge to literacy education is based on the alignment of theory and practice. Current literacy practices are underpinned by schema theory. But, as dual coding theory suggests, language and literacy are not exclusively verbal; readers and writers also image.5 Even though one third of the English in the New Zealand Curriculum document is Visual Language this only refers to images "out there" (e.g., pictures, videos, film),6 The place of dual coding theory as a model to underpin and justify policy, programs and practice has yet to be fully debated. Dual coding theory provides a challenge to schema theory and may result in the development of additional practices and resources consistent with its explanation of cognition. Furthermore, the extent to which findings from cognitive neuroscience challenge and support current practice are yet to be realized in literacy programs, and are yet to be articulated in teacher research materials and programs.

Current practice and resources in New Zealand, however, do reflect the application of current research-based reading comprehension practices. Likewise, the current range of research projects signals a high degree of innovation in literacy practice. Much of this research is aimed at meeting the needs of a multi-cultural and multi-literate society. It is research aimed at redefining literacy as much as it is aimed at meeting the needs of students with culturally appropriate practice. Although most New Zealand teachers have moved beyond the great debate between "whole language" and "phonics",

the research on phonemic and phonological awareness is reflected in the Ministry of Education's decision to provide advice and support to schools to incorporate successful phonics programs and ensure that future instructional reading materials incorporate text designed to allow for explicit word-analysis strategies to enhance the teaching of phonics. At the same time there is a need to help our best readers read better.

Finally, there has always been a tension between government requirements for accountability and the professional role of practitioners. The current English in the New Zealand Curriculum was seen by many as an agent of teacher accountability as much as an innovation for literacy education. Likewise, the proposals to establish national testing of 9 and 14 year olds, and the accountability requirements of the Education Review Office are contentious areas of debate. Clearly, striking a balance between time spent on assessment and accountability and time spent on teaching and developing programs is an ongoing issue in New Zealand as well as in other countries. Related to this issue is that of maintaining professionalism and independence. There is concern that those who hold the power drive the research, that the implementation of prescribed unit standards, and the recommendation of effective practice by those in power may be undermining teachers' professionalism and independence.

Conclusion

New Zealand teachers are involved in literacy initiatives that are working, especially for slow progress readers. While exciting progress is being made, the full impact of current initiatives has yet to be realized and further improvements to literacy learning are still being sought. New Zealand teachers also have their eyes focused on

how to address future challenges. The current initiatives of the Literacy Strategy and this acknowledgement of future challenges augurs well for New Zealand literacy education.

1 The Taskforce's report is available at: http://www.minedu.govt.nz/schools/literacy/

2 See www.tki.org.nz/e/literacy for more information on the New Zealand's Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

3 For information on the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) go to http://nemp.otago.ac.nz

4 See www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/indexe.php

5 See http://www.readingonline.org/research/Sadoski.html

6 See http://www.minedu.govt.nz/web/downloadable/dl3550_v1/ENG%5FNZC.pdf

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